

INTRODUCTION

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for this reason as for any other that he deserves his position as one of the leading spokesmen of our age.

His QEdipus tells us that he knew his answer to the Sphinx long before the question was put to him, for every youth encounters an enigma to which the only solution is Man. Furthermore, for each one of us, says the King of Thebes, that man is necessarily himself. Again in the recent *Thesee* (1946) Gide has brought together toward the end of their lives blind QEdipus, the victim of the gods, and Theseus, the conqueror of the Minotaur and builder of Athens. In this supreme confrontation GEdipus vaunts the inner world he has discovered by blacking out the visible universe and releasing the divinity within, whereas the materialistic Theseus feels confirmed in his philosophic naturalism. This capital dialogue (has not the author told us he was a creature of dialogue?) receives light from a supplement to the *Journals* written in June 1942: "As soon as I understood that, instead of existing already, God was *becoming* and that it depended on each one of us that he should become, my ethical sense was restored." Gide refuses to see any impiety in this statement since it is also true that man culminates in God, and creation, which culminates in man, starts from God. Hence there is no question of blindly obeying God. Rather, one must infuse life into God, "demanding him of oneself through love and obtaining him through virtue." These words were written in Tunisia during some of the darkest days of the recent war. It is fair to consider them as representative of Gide's mature philosophy. It is characteristic of the author, as of the times, that he should add less than a week later: "But how slow God is in becoming!"

As a stylist Andre Gide has always been admired even by those of

his countrymen who are least sympathetic to his "message." The apparent paradox of his basing his aesthetics on the very classical austerity that he had fled on the ethical plane has been pointed out by commentators. One even suggests that his original puritanism simply deviated into literary purism, since if the puritan is a purist in morals, the purist is also a puritan in taste.

In the *Journals* can be seen Gide's deliberate forging of a style at once classical and personal until the slightest thing he writes bears a peculiar mark. He tells why he purified his language of metaphors in his first book and then longed for an even poorer, nuder style, for which he sought inspiration in Stendhal. Later he confesses his desire to achieve inimitability by dint of the secret perfection of his sentences. On the other hand, he often sees the *Journals* themselves as an exercise in spontaneous rapid composition, since, disliking to write rapidly, he must force himself to do so here. Nothing could be more characteristically Gidian, as his adolescence and African experience abundantly illustrate, than this need of constraining himself to cast off constraint.